

Daniel Lindmark (ed), *Swedishness Reconsidered: Three Centuries of Swedish-American Identities*. Umeå: Kulturens Frontlinjer. Skrifter från forskningsprogrammet Kulturgrans Norr 18, 1999. 142 pp., ISBN: 91-88466-25-6, SEK 140, paper.

During the past decade a certain reorientation of scholarship on the Scandinavian-American immigrant experience has taken place. First, under the inspiration from

work on 'invented tradition' and 'imagined communities' by such scholars as Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson and Werner Sollors, a growing interest in investigating constructed national, as opposed to parochial or regional, identities among Scandinavian-American immigrants has surfaced. Second, whereas researchers tended earlier to focus either on why migration from the Scandinavian countries to the United States came about in the first place, or on how the migrants experienced the movement from the Old World to the New in its trans-Atlantic totality, there has recently been an emphasis on studying the immigrants primarily in their American environment. Both these tendencies emerge clearly in *Swedishness Reconsidered*, a collection of five essays written by scholars connected with Umeå University. The essays signify the closing of the Swedish-American dimension of the research project, *Cultural Boundaries in Northern Areas*, and simultaneously mark the opening of a new enterprise, *Boundaries of Swedishness*. The title of the latter undertaking is inspired by the sociologist Fredrik Barth's conception of ethnicity as the demarcation of borders, yet at the same time the Umeå researchers insist that the plastic cultural contents within those borders are also worth investigating. In practice, the main theme unifying the five essays is the concept of Swedishness which is analyzed within five quite separate and not easily comparable contexts.

In his highly original investigation of Swedish-American church life along the Delaware River in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Daniel Lindmark, using a perspective inspired by postcolonial studies, emphasizes the degree to which Swedish communicants on the American 'periphery' were able to act independently of their mother church in Sweden in matters of religion. True, the evidently growing inter-confessional cooperation between the Swedish-American clergy and the Anglican Church might perhaps be interpreted as a loss from an 'imperial' Swedish perspective that defines Swedishness rigidly in terms of language and confession. From a peripheral viewpoint that focuses on the *function* of Swedish-American congregations, however, joint action made sense: through a collaborative effort with the Anglican Church a generational shift took place among Swedish Americans whereby young Lutherans were transformed into American Protestants and thus became better equipped to cope with American colonial society, whereas older Swedish-American immigrants remained for a while to fill the Swedish-language Lutheran churches. Lindmark raises the question of whether this inter-confessional strategy signifies 'Americanization' or whether it simply demonstrates the degree to which religion in a broader sense remained important to a population element not wholly integrated into colonial American society? The latter suggestion, in turn, implies that Swedish-American identity did not necessarily hinge on Lutheranism but perhaps simply on a broad, 'respectable' anti-Catholic, anti-Quaker Protestantism.

Roger Kvist discusses Swedishness from a mid-nineteenth-century political perspective. He interprets general Swedish-American support for the emergent Republican Party as an expression of religious pietistic perfectionism transformed into political perfectionism via, first, the slavery issue, second, anti-Catholicism and, third, respect for Yankee Protestant culture. Drawing heavily on the 'ethnocultural interpretation' of American political history, Kvist makes the bombastic assertion that in the election of 1856, 'In the Midwest, *all* Yankees and Scandinavians now voted Repub-

lican...' (49, my emphasis). Without discussing the hostility with which the Swedish state church was viewed by many Swedish immigrants in the 1850s, Kvist insists, moreover, that pioneer Swedish Lutheran pastors, especially Augustana Synod leader Tufve Nilsson Hasselquist, played a key role in transforming Swedish Americans into Republicans: 'It is difficult to imagine any other person who did more to turn the Swedish immigrants into Republicans than Hasselquist' (56). Kvist's statement may be accurate, yet it is worth adding that years later Hasselquist actually supported a *Democrat* running for Congress (cf, the Swedish-American newspaper *Nemlandet*, October 23 and 30, 1890).

Per Nordahl investigates Swedishness from the perspective of the Swedish-American secular provincial societies that cropped up in Chicago especially during the 1920s. Cataloguing these associations in extensive detail, he views them as 'strategic tools for integration' (85). Noting that earlier Swedish-American organizations founded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had been national in scope, Nordahl suggests that the shift from a national to a provincial focus may be interpreted as a reaction to the pressure exerted by the campaign for '100 percent Americanism' during the First World War: a Swedishness based on regional identity rather than national pride would seem less offensive to the hyper-sensitive American public. Appealing as this hypothesis indeed is, a comparative analysis involving the parallel Norwegian-American regional societies would be interesting, since the latter societies, as Odd S. Lovoll's research makes clear, generally arose early in the twentieth century, prior to the First World War.

Inspired by Jon Gjerde's concept of complementary identity, Nordahl shares with Carina Ronnqvist a general view of 'Swedish' identity in North America as being, from an immigrant perspective, fully compatible with 'American' identity. Whereas the Swedish component points towards the (romantic) past, the American points towards the future. Employing this perspective, Ronnqvist analyzes the letter collections of three Swedish immigrants who traveled to Canada in the early twentieth century. Ronnqvist's study is innovative in that she analyzes ethnicity from the perspective not only of nationalism but also of gender and class; she thus emphasizes that in the secularized Canadian environment of the early twentieth century ethnicity was typically experienced differently by men and women. Ronnqvist's source material, however, is problematic: she analyzes the fates of only three Swedish immigrants, all male (and of different social backgrounds), and chronologically their letter collections only overlap partially, representing the periods 1905-12, the 1920s-50s and 1911-59, respectively.

Per-Olof Gronberg, finally, investigates the concept of Swedishness among a small subgroup of Swedish Americans in Chicago, i.e., the 218 Swedish engineers who between 1909 and 1913 became active members of the Swedish Engineers' Society of Chicago. Employing an impressive array of sources to analyze their fates, Gronberg asks who remained in America and who returned to Sweden. He suggests that those journeying back to Sweden were typically sojourner personalities who from the outset had planned eventually to return, whereas the majority remaining in Chicago were intent on becoming Americans while retaining pride in their national heritage. The emphasis on national, as opposed to regional, tradition is crucial, because the

engineers came from the educated, geographically mobile middling echelons of Swedish society and thus, Gronberg suggests, felt greater reverence for nation than for region or parish. There are certain methodological problems involved in Gronberg's analysis. First, the geographical fate of 60 of the 218 engineers (27.5 per cent) is unknown, even though Gronberg suggests that a high proportion of them may have returned to Sweden. Second, the very act of joining the Society may in itself be viewed, perhaps, as an initial investment in a long-term stay in Chicago. Third, as Gronberg himself concedes, his analysis focuses on class and ethnicity as determining factors for staying in America or not, yet generally speaking return migration has been demonstrated to correlate heavily with gender distribution within nationality groups.

All in all, *Swedishness Reconsidered* is an interesting collection of essays that marks the opening of a new research project which promises over the years to throw more light on the process of identity formation among Swedish immigrants in North America across three centuries.

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